

REMARKS

This communication is a full and timely response to the aforementioned non-final Office Action dated April 1, 2009. Claims 1-6 and 8-18 are not amended and remain in the application. Reconsideration of the application and withdrawal of the rejections of the claims are respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

I. Allowed Claims

Applicant thanks the Examiner for kindly indicating that claims 5, 9-11, 13 and 15. No amendments have been made to the allowed claims.

II. Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 1-4, 6, 8, 12, 14 and 16-18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Miyawaki (U.S. Patent No. 6,032,001) in view of Sekizawa (U.S. Patent No. 6,430,711). This rejection is respectfully traversed for at least the following reasons.

Claim 1 recites an equipment management apparatus for transmitting management information collected from a plurality of equipment to a centralized management apparatus. Claim 1 recites that the equipment management apparatus comprises a detector for detecting a trouble which has occurred in a first image forming apparatus for forming an image on a sheet.

Claim 1 also recites that the equipment management apparatus comprises a transmission controller for, when the trouble is detected by the detector, transmitting management information about a second image forming apparatus for forming an image on a sheet, in which the trouble has not occurred and which is independent from the first image forming apparatus, together with the trouble information about the first image forming apparatus to the centralized management apparatus.

Claim 12 recites an equipment management system comprising the equipment management apparatus recited in claim 1. Claim 14 recites an equipment management method comprising steps corresponding to the operations of the equipment management apparatus recited in claims 1 and 12.

Applicant respectfully submits that Miyawaki does not disclose or suggest all the recited features of independent claims 1, 12 and 14 for the following reasons.

In particular, Applicant respectfully submits that Miyawaki does not disclose or suggest at least the following two features of claims 1, 12 and 14:

(1) the transmission controller transmits the management information about the second image forming apparatus, in which the trouble has not occurred, together with the trouble information about the first image forming apparatus to the centralized management apparatus; and

(2) the transmission controller transmits the management information about the second image forming apparatus, in which the trouble has not occurred, together with the trouble information about the first image forming apparatus to the centralized management apparatus when the trouble which has occurred in the first image forming apparatus is detected by the detector.

As acknowledged by the Office, Miyawaki does not disclose or suggest features (1) and (2) of claims 1, 12 and 14. In striving to arrive at the claimed invention, the Office applied Sekizawa and asserted that Sekizawa discloses features (1) and (2) of claims 1, 12 and 14.

This assertion is not supportable. Sekizawa does not disclose or suggest features (1) and (2) of claims 1, 12 and 14, for at least the following reasons.

With reference to Figure 1, Sekizawa discloses a machine monitor system 1 that includes several agent units 10, a console unit 20, and a mail server 19. The agent units 10 are located in a first-type area 2a (narrow area) in which the agent unit 10 is connected to one or more printers P(n) via a local area network (LAN) 3a. The agent unit 10 is connected to the mail server 19 and console unit 20 via a router 4 and a second-type computer network (Internet) 6. With regard to the agent unit 10 in first-type area 2a, this agent unit 10 gets status information $\Phi 1$ that indicates the operation state of each network printer P connected to the LAN 3a. The status information $\Phi 1$ indicates a toner remaining amount, an ink remaining amount, and photosensitive drum remaining life. The agent unit 10 then prepares a status mail $\Phi 2$ that includes the status information for each printer within its LAN 3a, addresses and sends the status mail $\Phi 2$ to the console unit 20 via the router 4 and network 6, and the console unit 20 then stores the received status mail $\Phi 2$ in the mail server 19.

Similar to the agent unit 10a in network 2a, the agent units 10 in networks 2b, 2c send a status mail $\Phi 2$ containing the status information of the printer(s) connected to their respective LANs (see Column 18, line 54 to Column 19, line 35).

Figure 22 of Sekizawa illustrates the information that is sent in a status mail $\Phi 2$ from an agent unit 10. Sekizawa discloses that the agent units 10 send the status mails $\Phi 2$ to the console unit 20 independent of the console unit 20, or the agent units 10 can send the status mails $\Phi 2$ to the console unit 20 in response to a request from the console unit 20 (see Column 19, lines 36-42).

With reference to Figure 3, each agent unit 10 includes a timer monitor section 17 which monitors the timing at which a local information getting section 11 gets the status information $\Phi 1$ from the local printer(s), and the timing at which the local information transmission section transmits the status mail $\Phi 2$ to the console unit 20 (see Column 20, line 50 to Column 21, line 8, and Column 21, lines 31-35). Each agent unit 10 also includes an error table retention table 9 in which errors are logged in a status log file 12a until a control section 15 determines that an error level is fatal, in which case the control section 15 creates a fatal error log file 12d and stores the fatal error log file 12 in the local information retention section 12 (see Column 21, lines 45-62).

If the control unit 15 determines that the error level corresponding to the status information $\Phi 1$ gotten from one network printer P is fatal (status code > 6000), the control unit 15 transmits a special status mail in which the contents of the error log file 12 are stored. This special status mail is referred to as a fatal occurrence mail (see Column 21, line 67 to Column 22, line 6). On the other hand, if no fatal error is detected, the control unit 15 causes a status mail $\Phi 2$ to be sent at a predetermined, scheduled timing (see Column 32, lines 4-23, and Figure 7).

If a fatal error log file 12d has been created to document, in text format, the information of a printer suffering a fatal flaw, the control unit 15 (CPU 30) checks whether information from the failed printer has been obtained within the last minute. If it is longer than one minute, the control unit 15 causes the status information of the failed printer to be obtained for only the network printers whose status is set to be gotten, i.e., those printers identified in the fatal error log file 12d). Then, the control unit 15 causes the special fatal occurrence mail (as one type of a status mail) to be

sent. Figure 21 illustrates the fatal error log file 12 that includes information about a printer that is detected to have a fatal error. If a record in the fatal error log file 12d exists for more than an hour, the control unit 15 then causes a second type of special status mail to be sent, which is referred to as a service call error mail in which the network printer having the fatal error longer than an hour is identified (see Column 31, line 60 to Column 32, line 57, and Column 44, line 61 to Column 45, line 12).

The Office appears to have interpreted Sekizawa as disclosing that an agent unit 10 sends a status mail about one network printer (e.g., printer P1) in which a fatal error has occurred together with status information about another network printer (e.g., printer P2) in which an error has not occurred. However, the disclosure of Sekizawa does not support this interpretation. On the contrary, Sekizawa discloses that in the case of a fatal error log file 12d, only the status information of network printers identified in the fatal error log file 12d is obtained and sent as a fatal occurrence mail, which is a special type of status mail (see Column 31, line 60 to Column 32, line 57).

In an attempt to arrive at the subject matter of claims 1, 12 and 14, the Office referred to Figures 24 and 25, Column 36, lines 50-65 and Column 44, lines 35-60 of Sekizawa. However, these sections of Sekizawa pertain the possibility that the information from multiple status mails can be reviewed because they are successively stored at the mail server 19 so that personnel associated with the printers (e.g., service personnel employed by the printer manufacturer) can review the historical status of each printer. None of the cited sections, nor any other section of Sekizawa, discloses or suggests the feature of an agent unit transmitting status information about a second network printer, in which an error has not occurred, together with fatal error information about a first network printer to the console unit 20 when the error is detected to have occurred in the first network printer.

On the contrary, as discussed above, Sekizawa discloses that when a fatal error is detected to have occurred, then a special fatal error mail is sent containing error information about only the failed printer(s) (Column 44, line 61 to Column 45, line 12). If the error continues for an hour, another special service call error mail is sent, which similarly contains information about only the failed printer(s).

Therefore, neither the special fatal error mail nor the special service call error mail of Sekizawa include information about any network printer in which an error has not occurred. Similarly, the normal (error-free) status mail of Sekizawa is not sent when a trouble is detected.

Accordingly, for at least the foregoing reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that Sekizawa does not disclose or suggest a transmission controller that transmits the management information about the second image forming apparatus, in which the trouble has not occurred, together with the trouble information about the first image forming apparatus to the centralized management apparatus when the trouble which has occurred in the first image forming apparatus is detected by the detector, as recited in claims 1, 12 and 14.

Consequently, Sekizawa cannot cure the deficiencies of Miyawaki for failing to disclose or suggest features (1) and (2) of claims 1, 12 and 14, since Sekizawa also fails to disclose or suggest these features.

Therefore, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1, 12 and 14 are patentable over Miyawaki and Sekizawa, since Miyawaki and Sekizawa, either individually or in combination, fail to disclose or suggest all the recited features of claims 1, 12 and 14.

Accordingly, for at least the foregoing reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1, 12 and 14, as well as claims 2-4, 6, 8 and 16-18 which depend therefrom, are patentable over the applied references.

Dependent claims 2-4, 6, 8 and 16-18 recite further distinguishing features over the applied references. The foregoing explanation of the patentability of independent claims 1, 12 and 14 is sufficiently clear such that it is believed to be unnecessary to separately demonstrate the additional patentable features of the dependent claims at this time. However, Applicant reserves the right to do should it become appropriate.

III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is clearly in condition for allowance. Accordingly, a favorable examination and consideration of the instant application are respectfully requested.

If, after reviewing this Request, the Examiner believes there are any issues remaining which must be resolved before the application can be passed to issue, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned by telephone in order to resolve such issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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